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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000115

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TAGS: PREL PGOV VI KOC LO

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SLOVAK MFA STILL TRYING TO PERSUADE GOS,
BUT WORRYING POLITICAL SIGNS CONTINUE

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee, for reasons
1.4(b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. MFA Political Director Miroslav Lajcak indicated to us Feb. 23 that the MFA is continuing its efforts to prevent Slovak politicians from passing the point of no return on the Kosovo issue. Lajcak, who considers this goal feasible, is busy orchestrating meetings or phonecalls with Slovak governing coalition and opposition politicians to shape the parliamentary debate. Lajcak is looking forward to PDAS DiCarlo's Feb. 28 visit as a significant part of this process, and is trying to enlist UK and German leaders in the effort. He offered advice on arguments he thought would work best to convince Slovak politicians not to risk a split with the EU and a blow to the UN's handling of the issue. Another Embassy source close to former PM Dzurinda paints a more troubling picture of PM Fico's support for a tough Serbian line. END SUMMARY.

DOMESTIC PERSUASION

¶12. (C) Following on FM Kubis's meetings in New York and Washington, Poldir Lajcak continues his attempts to persuade Slovak coalition and opposition officials not to tie the MFA's hands on Kosovo. He views a Slovak National Party draft resolution as largely hortatory and vastly better than former PM Dzurinda's resolution, although SNS may be revising it. (Note: Parliamentary Speaker Pavol Paska told Ambassador 2/22 that he would do all he could to block Dzurinda's proposal.) In speaking with Smer and SDKU representatives, Lajcak is using the following arguments:

- Restricting the MFA's maneuverability with a binding parliamentary resolution on Kosovo will only take Slovakia out of the process at the international diplomatic level. Slovakia would no longer have a voice at the EU table, and thus would not be able to do anything to help the Serbs with whom they sympathize. Slovakia showed it could have an impact on the EU voice (referencing the last GAERC meeting). If Slovakia wants to be part of drafting the EU statement, the MFA must have a free range of dialogue.
- It's time to demonstrate that Slovakia can be a responsible member of the EU;
- Slovak politicians must stop thinking about what's best for Serbia and start thinking about what's best for Slovakia;
- To politicians of the ruling SMER, Lajcak plans to argue that a binding resolution would do little harm to Mr. Dzurinda as an opposition MP, but long-lasting damage to the Fico government internationally;
- In Serbia, rather than thanking their Slavic brothers in Slovakia, the Serbs are laughing at the Slovak domestic uproar over the Kosovo issue.

INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

¶3. (C) Lajcak emphasized the need to use a variety of EU and US overtures to Slovak MPs and leaders prior to the parliamentary session beginning March 20. He has helped arranged the following meetings:

- 2/26 Boris Zala, Smer MP and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, will see Ahtisaari in Berlin (DAS DiCarlo will meet with Zala and other Smer MPs on 2/28);
- 3/2 FM Kubis will meet Ahtisaari in Vienna
- Hopefully, a meeting next week between Albert Rohan and former PM Dzurinda, SDKU Chairman and MP. Miro was meeting with Dzurinda foreign policy advisor Milan Jezovica just after he met with us to pitch the meeting;
- Lajcak asked his British and German Political Director counterparts to weigh in with Blair and Merkel to raise Kosovo directly with Fico and perhaps Dzurinda.
- Lajcak noted that DiCarlo's visit is well-timed; but one expert visit is enough. After DiCarlo, any contacts, including from the Brits or others, would need to be at a higher political level to have an impact.

SLOVAK STATESMANSHIP

¶4. (C) Lajcak reiterated that Fico had previously agreed to respect the MFA's position on Kosovo, but this changed after Dzurinda pushed him domestically. In Lajcak's opinion, we should continue to keep in contact with President Gasparovic since the President understands the need to act as a member of the EU and NATO. The question between Fico and Dzurinda now is who will become the responsible international statesman and who will be left in the role of fuming nationalist.

AT THE UN

¶5. (C) UN Secretary General Ban ki Moon had impressed FM Kubis on Kosovo at their meeting in NY. The SYG made it very clear that he fully supported the Ahtisaari plan and wanted UNSC endorsement of it soon. The UNSC could not lose this opportunity. Kubis would try to use the UNSYG's strong line in his arguments back here. Lajcak explained that Slovakia does not intend to follow the Russians in a UN vote. He clarified that certain wording would, because of the domestic political situation, move Slovakia closer to voting with the Russians. Lajcak found it significant that Russian Ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin had said it would be unacceptable to see an "independent Kosovo" gain membership to the UN or World Bank, implying that there might be flexibility in the Russian position. Previously very worried about a Russian veto, Lajcak sees a greater prospect for an abstention. He noted, however, that Churkin had objected to even World Bank membership for Kosovo, a tougher position than that of Belgrade.

THE LATEST IN VIENNA

¶6. (C) Just prior to meeting the DCM, Lajcak had finished a phone call with Albert Rohan. Rohan had said that no real progress was being made at the discussions in Vienna. Rohan expects nothing more than a few minor points to be resolved as a face-saving gesture before the talks conclude next week. Incidentally, Lajcak was fully aware that the Serbs cited the Slovaks in the Vienna talks. He said he had received a text message almost immediately after it happened.

A TROUBLING CLAIM

¶7. (C) In a Feb. 23 luncheon with the Ambassador, Martin Bruncko (strictly protect), former advisor to then-FM Miklos, current advisor to former PM Dzurinda and personal friend of Serbian President Tadic, said that:

-- Fico and Kubis had called Tadic after Kubis's recent faux pas with Vuk Draskovic and pledged to "carry Serbia's water," (NOTE: Without revealing this claim, we queried PolDir Lajcak about the Draskovic incident. He claimed that Kubis had met quietly with Draskovic last week and patched things up, and

that Kubis did not feel under pressure to be more supportive of the Serbs to make up for the incident. End note.);
-- Dzurinda was not freelancing in his tough pro-Serb stance, but was only part of a larger European People's Party effort to back Belgrade that included "the current holder of the EU Presidency"; and

-- President Tadic accepts Kosovo independence but believes it would be more palatable to have the issue come to a head after formation of a new Serbian government.

(Comment: We cannot vouch for the accuracy of Bruncko's statements. Even if that were just a perception, it would reinforce the value of a Merkel call to Dzurinda as part of the effort to get the former PM to back off. End comment)

VALLEE